

July 19, 1958

President C. A. Elvehjem
University of Wisconsin
Madison 6, Wisconsin

Dear President Elvehjem:

As you know I have agreed to accept an appointment as Professor of Genetics at the Stanford University School of Medicine. If it is mutually agreeable and convenient, I would like to be placed on leave status (without pay) until September 1, 1959 or even to June 30, 1960, in order to facilitate the termination of research grants and to meet the needs of some students completing their graduate study. The most likely date of my departure is April 1, 1959, but I hope to work out a final decision on this point with Deans Froker and Bowers.

I am sure you recognize the character of the special opportunity at Stanford which was a major factor in my decision to move. Genetics and biochemistry are rapidly converging on the fine structure and biosynthesis of nucleic acid, but there are very few individual workers or balanced research teams that can most effectively bridge the gap between the two sciences. As you know, Professor Kornberg is a preeminent worker in nucleic acid biochemistry, having done the pioneering work on their enzymatic synthesis. The pending move of his entire department whose interests are all focused on related problems and Stanford University's proffer of a chair in Genetics, with closely integrated laboratory facilities, made for a unique opportunity to converge on what I consider to be the most salient problem in biology today.

That this opportunity has arisen elsewhere would reflect no discredit to Wisconsin, except perhaps in the limitation of my own imagination during the past several years when I should have anticipated these developments and made more vigorous proposals to meet them here. With the scientific interest and insight of its officers, I have no doubt at all that Wisconsin can and will be the seat of equally striking research in this field. However, our present faculties in biochemistry are already preoccupied with other problems just as valid and significant as the biosynthesis of nucleic acids in microorganisms. It is a rare occasion, when, as at Stanford, an entire department of biochemistry can be built in one place, and oriented in such a way as to complement perfectly another biologist's resources and interests.

My association with Wisconsin since 1947 has been most happy and productive. I have always had the most cordial relationships with its officers, and they have always been at least one step ahead of my reasonable aspirations in such matters as relative salary and rank. As for the rest of the faculty,

It is enough to say that Wisconsin is an ideal place for scholarly work. I shall be fortunate if the specific programmatic opportunity at Stanford is matched by an overall academic setting and the wise and sympathetic administration of its affairs that matches these elements at Wisconsin. You can be sure that my eagerness to advance specific aspects of my research is tempered by anticipated regrets for the Wisconsin academic climate and for the friendships my wife and I have built up here.

Finally, I want to record my special appreciation for Dean Bowers with whom I have been most closely associated during the past two years. He has had rare vision and zeal in promoting the growth of research opportunities at our medical school and I will miss his leadership and support, especially for the program in medical genetics in which we have both been especially interested. I know that my successor in this field can look forward to a remarkable opportunity in a congenial setting. This would not be possible if it were not for the sympathetic cooperation of our colleagues in the College of Agriculture.

I hope you will do me the favor of communicating this letter to the Regents of the University. With deepest personal appreciations,

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg

CC: Dean Bowers
Dean Froher
Professor Irwin